

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

SE News
HD **Discuss 'eco anxiety' with children, then help them find ways to act on climate, mental-health experts say**
BY By DAVE MCGINN
CR Staff
WC 903 words
PD 4 December 2021
SN The Globe and Mail
SC GLOB
ED Ontario
PG A17
LA English
CY ©2021 The Globe and Mail Inc. All Rights Reserved.
LP

Erin Renwick and her children were watching a nature documentary two years ago that showed walrus in the north dying as a result of climate change.

It hit the entire family hard, but was particularly difficult for her youngest daughter, who was 12 at the time, says Ms. Renwick, a landscape designer who lives in Victoria.

TD

"She was just totally devastated, completely devastated. And a feeling of helplessness came over our family," Ms. Renwick says.

Her two older children's anxieties about the climate periodically resurface, usually when there are disasters such as the forest fires and flooding that have devastated B.C.

"But for my youngest, it's never gone. It's always there every day," Ms. Renwick says.

She is hardly alone. Psychologists and other mental-health experts say many children are increasingly suffering from "eco anxiety," described by the American Psychological Association as "anxiety or worry about climate change and its effects."

This past September, researchers at the University of Bath in the U.K. published a study that surveyed more than 10,000 people between the ages of 16 and 25 from 10 countries about their feelings on climate change. Nearly 60 per cent said they were "worried" or "extremely worried." Three-quarters of them said the future is frightening.

Parents, such as Ms. Renwick, are grappling with how to help their children navigate this uncharted territory.

The place to start, mentalhealth professionals say, is talking to kids about their eco anxiety, and just as importantly, if not more so, finding actions for them to take to help give them a sense of control.

"This is a major existential threat for us all with a lot of quite scary images and stories associated with it," says Sean Kidd, chief of psychology at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto. "It can feel out of control, something you can do nothing about. It's this massive thing.

And a big driver of anxiety is when somebody feels like and is thinking this is a huge problem that I can do nothing about."

Karyn Gordon, a Torontobased business and family coach who frequently sees children dealing with eco anxiety, says parents need to begin the conversation by validating their kids' feelings.

"You want to acknowledge the anxiety and listen to it, but then shift the focus to action," she says.

"You have to find the right balance between talking about things but then also talking about actions you can take.

If you only talk about natural disaster, people feel helpless," says Ms. Gordon, author of *The Three Chairs: How Great Leaders Drive Communication, Performance, and Engagement*.

Taking action can begin by finding a community of likeminded people, says Michael Cheng, a child and family psychiatrist at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario.

Alexandra Haedrich joined the Montreal chapter of For Our Kids, a national network of parents and grandparents fighting climate change, in part to help her 11year-old daughter deal with her eco anxiety and climate grief.

"It's something we all talk about in the group, for sure, the kids' anxiety and our own," says Ms. Haedrich, an administrator at the Institut des Sciences Mathématiques. "I feel that a big part of my role as a parent now in 2021 is building some kind of physical and psychological resilience in my child for what is to come."

As well as talking to her daughter about biodiversity and the importance of protecting areas for wildlife, Ms. Haedrich tries to involve her in various climate-action projects, from planting a garden at her school to other forms of activism.

"Before the pandemic we had a card-writing campaign," she says.

Her daughter wrote a letter to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau about the importance of saving the climate.

Ms. Haedrich has also taken her daughter to climate marches.

This all has helped give her child a greater sense of agency, Ms. Haedrich says.

Developing that sense of agency helps kids who are dealing with any form of anxiety avoid feelings of helpless and hopelessness, Dr. Kidd says.

For very young children, even something such as having them turn off the lights in rooms that aren't being used, or helping them plant a pollinator garden in the yard can have a positive effect, Dr. Kidd says.

Ms. Renwick and her youngest daughter "quickly moved to action" after that feeling of hopelessness fell over the family in 2019. Along with other members of the community, they successfully lobbied their school board to declare a climate emergency.

Ms. Renwick's daughter started an environmental club at the school. They joined Parents 4 Climate, a group committed to ensuring children have a healthy planet.

All of it has significantly helped her daughter's eco anxiety, Ms. Renwick says. "It's better now in lots of ways," she says.

She still has anxiety about the environment and our impact on climate, but it is something they continue to talk about and try to take action on regularly, Ms. Renwick says.

It's a conversation parents can't just have once with their children, Dr. Kidd says.

With each new climate-related disaster, parents will have to check in with their children, he says. "This is one of our new normals."

CO apsy : American Psychological Association

NS gclimt : Climate Change | gcat : Political/General News | genv : Natural Environment | gglobe :
Global/World Issues

RE cana : Canada | namz : North America

IPD News

PUB The Globe and Mail Inc.

AN Document GLOB000020211204ehc40000x